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Trends

History at the CIA

Will the public ever read about Central Intelligence Agency maneuvers in recent U.S. history? The CIA is thinking about it. Since the Freedom of Information Act was passed in 1966, the agency has been required to search all files for FOIA requests, even though it has not had to release details on sources and methods of gathering data. That became a problem as the number of requests it handled each year rose into the thousands. So last year Congress exempted the agency from searching through its "operational" files for FOIA requests. But then concern arose over whether the CIA would ever release sensitive information and, if so, when. Without it, says Professor Gaddis Smith of Yale, State Department accounts of recent U.S. history are "like Hamlet



The CIA's William Casey
Do spies make history?

without the prince." In letters to Minnesota Republican David Durenberger, now chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, CIA Director William Casey committed the agency to releasing some documents, and last month he met with Robert M. Warner, archivist of the U.S., Dr. John Broderick of the Library of Congress and historians from Yale, Ohio and Northwestern universities, who will make formal recommendations on how to proceed. The agency is not obliged to follow their advice, but, says chief CIA historian Kenneth McDonald, "The consultations were very useful, and we take seriously everything that was proposed."